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OLDER ADULTS, OLDER READERS:

WHAT WE KNOW AND NEED TO FIND OUT

February 1980

NEWSPAPER READERSHIP PROJECT

Newspaper Advertising Bureau, Inc. 485 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017

This study is one of a series of research studies conducted under the auspices of the Newspaper Readership Project, an industry-wide effort to promote circulation and readership.

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HIGHLIGHTS

Older adults (people 65 and older) are the fastest growing population segment in the 20th century. They have increased from 4% to 11% of the total U.S. population since 1900, and are expected to reach 12% by the year 2000, an increase of almost 300%. They form an age segment that is predominantly female and increasingly so.

Most senior citizens live in the states with the largest populations: for example, New York, California, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Texas, and Ohio. Sixty-two percent live in metropolitan areas, compared to 68% of the total U.S. population.

Older adults tend to have completed fewer years of formal education than younger adults; interest in and access to higher education are relatively recent (post-World War II) phenomena. Approximately 62% of the elderly are not high school graduates, 22% did graduate from high school, 8% completed one to three years of college and 8% are college graduates. By comparison, in 1978 16% of younger adults (25 to 34) are not high school graduates, 39% completed high school, 21% completed one to three years of college, and 24% are college graduates. While senior citizens have completed fewer years of formal education compared with younger adults, 62% of the people age 65 and older voted in the last Presidential election, compared with only 49% of the 18 to 34 age segment.

Most older adults are not in the labor force: only 20% of the men and 8% of the women are still wage-earners. By comparison, middle-aged (55 to 64) people are still active in the labor force; 74% of the men and 41% of the women are earning a salary. The 1977 average (mean) income for older adults was $8,035; this varied from an average of $16,620 for couples who both work down to $3,953 for unmarried women age 72 and over. About 14% of the elderly have incomes below federal poverty levels. It is important to understand the meaning of income levels for senior citizens because their net income is closer to their gross income than is the case for younger adults, and their income is not a good indicator of net worth or standard of living. Elderly people are active newspaper consumers: 74% read a paper "yesterday," 72% have weekday home delivery; 16% of all frequent readers (4-5 weekdays) are elderly vs. only 10% of all infrequent readers. Most senior citizens rate the newspaper as more important than television news; 65% opt for the added news details in a newspaper over television news coverage of major news stories.

Several marketing studies have found that senior citizens demonstrate strong brand loyalty to products and are less apt to try a competitor's new brand than are younger adults. Older adults tend to shop less frequently for food and spend more when they do go shopping, compared with younger adults.

INTRODUCTION: WHY STUDY OLDER ADULTS?

Wherever we turn, newspaper stories, television programs, movies, newsletters, and political campaigns are confronting us with the news about the "graying of America." Our government has a National Institute on Aging as well as a Federal Administration on Aging. Every state has an office on Aging, as do most major cities. We can see that the social fabric of our nation has gray and silver highlights, but what does that mean for the daily newspaper? Are older adults frequent or infrequent readers? If they are different from other readership segments, can this be an asset for the paper? What else have we learned about this growing segment of the population from past research?

First we will present a socioeconomic and demographic sketch of older adults to provide some perspective on this growing segment of our population, and consider some stereotypes about older Americans. Then we will explore the influence of retirement in later life, (since most older adults are retired), as well as the desire to continue working. Finally, we will describe older adults as newspaper readers and consumers.

The first part of the report draws largely on reports from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, or analyses that were based on data gathered by the Bureau of the Census. Data on older adults as mass

media users and consumers were drawn from a recent nationwide survey, "How the Public Gets Its News,"[1] plus supplementary information gathered by the Simmons Market Research Bureau.

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1) See "How the Public Gets Its News" (Newspaper Advertising Bureau, 1978) for a summary of the study's findings. A separately-published "Technical Appendix" provides a description of sampling and data sources.

I. SOCIOECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF OLDER ADULTS

For convenience and by convention, older adults are defined here as people age 65 and older. As a group they differ greatly in socioeconomic and demographic characteristics not only from younger people but also among themselves. This is particularly apparent when we compare people age 65 to 79 with those age 80 and older.

Older adults have been the fastest growing age segment of the population in the 20th century. They have increased from 4% to 11% of the U.S. population since 1900, and are expected to reach 12% by the year 2000. This group, increasing from 3.1 million to 24.1 million people since 1900, is predominantly female (see table 1). For example, there are approximately seven men to ten women among all older adults but there are less than six men for every ten women in the population age 75 and older. Over the next ten to twenty years, the ratio of men to women is expected to continue its steady decline. The average life expectancy at birth is estimated to be almost 74 years at present, compared with 70 years in 1968. Women tend to live about 8 years longer than men, (with men expected to reach age 71 and women almost 80 years). This is important in terms of the age structure of the population. While 65-plus has been the fastest growing age segment in this century, the 75 and older sub-group has been

increasing at three times the rate of those 65-74 since 1960.[1] At age 65 a man has an average life expectancy of about 14 more years (to age 79), and a woman has an average life expectancy of 18 more years (to age 83). The overall demographic picture, then, is one of increasing numbers of older adults, who are predominantly female, with particularly large increases in the proportions of very old people, age 80 and older.

Social and Economic Characteristics

Most older people live where everyone else lives: in states with the largest populations and in the metropolitan areas. Overall, because the elderly stay where they are living when they retire and do not move to other regions, those who do migrate generally go to retirement areas such as the sun belt or to non-urban areas where the cost of living is relatively low. This probably accounts for the slightly lower percentage of older adults living in metropolitan areas (62% vs. 68% for the population as a whole).

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1) For a comprehensive study of demographic aspects of aging see U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-23, Nos. 59, 78, 85; P-20, Nos. 99, 314, 324, 336. All figures cited are from these reports.

Table 1

Sex Ratios of the Population, by Broad Age Groups: 1950 to 2000
(Males per 100 females. Estimates and projections as of July 1. Figures include Armed Forces overseas.)

Age and projection series	1950	1960	1970	1976	1980	1990	2000
All Ages.....	99.3	97.0	94.8	94.8	95.1	95.2	95.1
Under 15 years.....	103.8	103.4	103.9	104.2	104.5	105.1	105.2
15 to 29 years.....	98.7	97.7	97.8	100.3	107.3	101.3	102.1
30 to 44 years.....	97.4	95.5	95.2	95.8	96.6	97.2	96.7
45 to 59 years.....	99.8	96.9	93.4	94.8	95.3	95.1	95.9
60 to 64 years.....	100.4	91.2	87.7	87.9	87.9	98.8	89.9
65 to 69 years.....	94.0	87.8	80.7	79.3	79.7	80.5	82.4
70 to 74 years.....	91.3	85.3	73.9	73.5	72.4	72.9	74.6
75 to 84 years.....	85.0	77.4	65.9	61.0	60.3	59.6	59.9
85 years and over.....	70.0	63.8	53.2	47.0	44.7	40.9	39.4
65 years and over.....	89.5	82.6	72.0	69.0	68.2	67.3	66.6
75 years and over.....	82.6	75.0	63.3	57.7	56.2	54.7	54.0

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P, 23, No. 78.

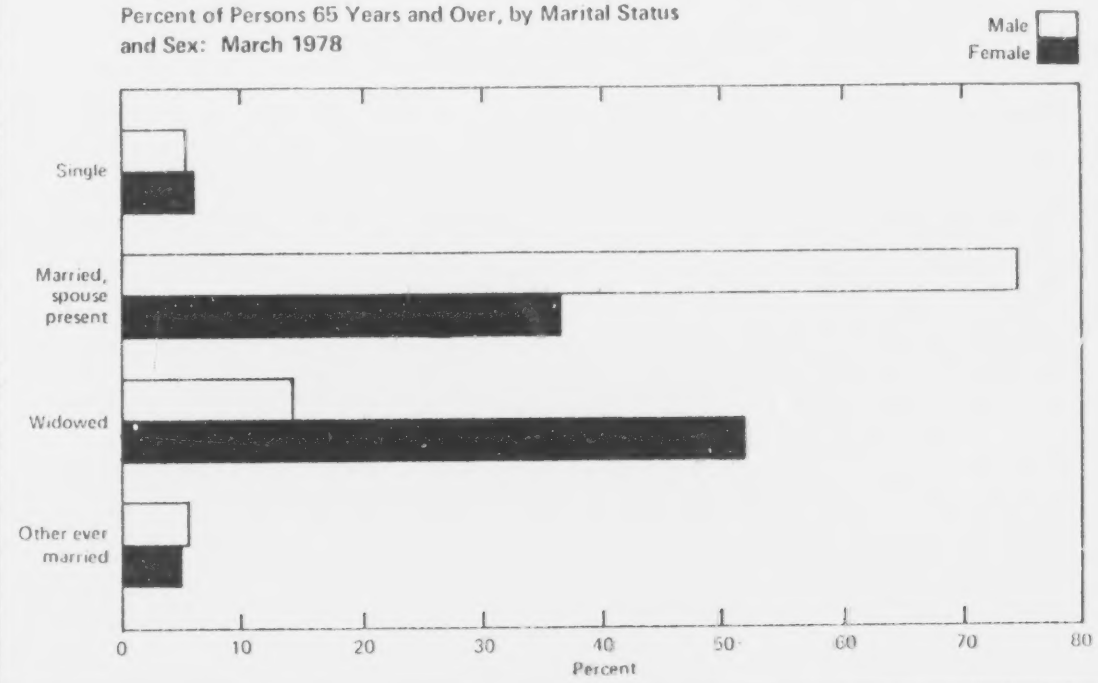
Marital Status

There are many stereotypes of elderly people that portray them as alone, poor and sick. While there are older adults who are poor, sick and lonely, most are not. A typical older adult lives with a relative, not alone (see figure 1). This does vary by sex: 75% of the older men live with their wives, but only 37% of the older women live with their husbands. The effects of differing mortality and longevity rates between sexes are very apparent here. In addition to dying at younger ages, men tend to marry younger women. Therefore when the men die, their surviving wives face many years of widowhood; 52% of older women are widows. Comparatively few, about 6%, of the elderly live in long-term care facilities. Those who do are typically widows, over age 80 who are physically and/or mentally incapable of living outside such a facility.

Education

As the facts noted earlier show, older adults tend to have completed fewer years of formal education than younger adults. Notwithstanding their lower educational attainment, older adults are more active participants in political life than young adults: 62% voted in the 1976 Presidential election, compared with 49% of those 18 to 34 years old. And their role in politics is growing and becoming more organized in form.

FIGURE 1.
Percent of Persons 65 Years and Over, by Marital Status and Sex: March 1978



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports Series P-23 No. 85

Work and Income

Most people 65 and older have retired from the labor force. The mean income of older people is $8,035, with substantial variations according to their family situation. Married couples have higher incomes than single people, and couples age 65 to 71 have higher incomes than couples 72 and older. For example, a married couple generally receives two Social Security checks or one with high payments, and a "younger" couple is more likely to include someone who is earning a salary. Within limits set by federal rules, people can work and still collect a Social Security check.

The pervasive image of poverty in old age is inaccurate. About 14% of the elderly have incomes below the federal poverty level; these tend to be people whose sole or major source of income is Social Security. It is also necessary to "interpret" income for older adults, particularly when comparing it to the income of younger adults. There is gross income and net income -- what remains after taxes and other deductions from a monthly check. Social Security checks are not taxable, and pensions and salaries for this age group are taxed at a lower rate, because their gross incomes are generally smaller than when they worked full time. As a result there is less disparity between gross and net income for old people than for younger adults. Discretionary purchasing power or consumer income not committed to daily essentials is difficult to estimate for older adults, because they tend to spend all of the income and their savings.[1] However, by

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1) Robert C. Atchley, The Social Forces in Later Life, 2d ed., (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1977), p. 239.

examining income in terms of dollars per person, we can see more of the advantages and disadvantages of the typically small elderly household.

> Small households do imply a small economic base. Living in this manner means that the residents must have a relatively secure source (or combination of sources) of income. As a matter of fact, the average amount of income per family member is over 90% as high for families of couples with the husband 65 or older as it is for all married couple families. Elderly persons who are not in families....have only 70% as much income as adults of all ages who are not in families.[1]

It is also useful to note that the elderly tend to own their own homes (71%), and many states now limit the real estate tax payments of the elderly to a fixed proportion of taxable income (the so-called "circuit-breaker"). This is important when examining the economic status of older adults from the perspective of net worth, which includes all economic assets, e.g. savings, home equity. Home ownership is a major aspect of net worth, and savings are near their maximum for those age 55 to 64 -- just before retirement.[2] This tends to reduce the number of elderly people who are defined as poor.

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1) Paul C. Glick, "The Future Marital Status and Living Arrangements of the Elderly," Gerontologist, Vol. 19, No. 3 (June 1979), pp. 301-09.

2) For a discussion of net worth see John C. Henretta, "Using Survey Data in the Study of Social Stratification in Late Life," Gerontologist, Vol. 19, No. 2 (April 1979), pp. 197-201.

II. THE INFLUENCE OF RETIREMENT IN LATER LIFE

Retirement

It is useful to consider what is meant by the term retirement. Reports from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, social science researchers, market researchers, etc. utilize the data from surveys that accept the respondent's self-categorization as "retired." The term retired is conventionally used to mean that an individual has worked and is no longer doing that work. But an individual may retire from one employer, collect a pension and/or Social Security benefits and work for a salary (part-time or full-time). Therefore, when someone says they are retired, they may or may not be working.[1]

However, most people over 65 are retired and not employed. And even taking the larger group of those over age 55, relatively few people over age 55 are unemployed and looking for work either full-time (2.2%) or part-time (4.5%).[2] Civilian labor force participation

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1) Robert C. Atchley, "Issues in Retirement Research," Gerontologist, Vol. 19, No. 1 (February 1979), pp. 44-54. Atchley has suggested that there are a minimum of eight retirement/employment statuses: "Housewife, no paid employment; housewife, retired from paid employment; retired, not employed; retired, employed part-time; retired, employed full-time; employed, part-time; employed, full-time; unemployed."

2) U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment and Earnings, Vol. 26 (October 1979), p. 46.

rates for men age 60 to 64, and 65-plus have been decreasing steadily for over twenty years. For example, in 1957, 83% of the 60 to 64 year-old men and 38% of those over age 64 were in the labor force. In 1977, 63% of the 60 to 64 year-olds and 20% of those 65 and over were working.[1] The rate of decline increased throughout the 1970's; in 1961, workers became eligible for reduced Social Security benefits at age 62, with full benefits at age 65. By 1977 the earning replacement rate of Social Security benefits for men who retired at age 65, i.e. the value of the benefit in the year of retirement divided by the median wage of the last full year of employment, reached 45%.[1] "Men who had worked in low income jobs -- those least likely to have pension coverage -- were most likely to keep working to supplement their small social security payments."[1] Overall, the increases in Social Security retirement payments, disability payments, and private pensions have facilitated retirement from the labor force. Furthermore, projections for the next decade anticipate a continuation of the decline in middle-aged and older adults who participate in the labor force (see table 2), notwithstanding recent legislation barring enforced retirement until age 70. (Rising inflation rates may, however, slow or even reverse this trend.)

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1) Philip L. Rones, "Older Men - The Choice Between Work and Retirement," Monthly Labor Review, Vol. 101 (November 1978), pp. 3-10.

Table 2

Labor Force Participation Rate by Sex and Age, to 1990
(In percentages)

Sex and age	Actual		Projected					
			High growth		Intermediate growth		Low growth	
	1970	1977	1985	1990	1985	1990	1985	1990
Total, age 16 and over	60.4	62.3	67.7	69.7	65.3	66.2	63.0	63.0
Men, age 16 and over..	79.7	77.7	79.4	80.0	77.0	76.4	74.7	73.3
16 to 24.....	69.4	74.1	78.9	81.0	76.4	76.1	74.4	73.3
16 to 19.....	56.1	61.0	66.8	70.8	63.6	64.8	61.5	61.9
20 to 24.....	83.3	85.7	87.8	89.1	85.7	85.0	83.7	82.4
25 to 54.....	95.8	94.2	95.1	95.6	93.5	93.1	92.2	91.1
55 and over.....	55.7	47.5	46.1	43.5	41.9	38.0	37.5	32.2
55 to 64.....	83.0	74.0	73.5	73.3	68.1	65.0	64.1	59.0
65 and over.....	26.8	20.1	19.7	18.1	16.7	15.0	11.9	9.4
Women, age 16 and over	43.3	48.4	57.1	60.4	54.8	57.1	52.4	53.8
16 to 24.....	51.3	59.6	73.2	78.2	69.8	72.8	66.2	67.3
16 to 19.....	44.0	51.4	63.5	68.9	59.7	62.8	55.4	56.8
20 to 24.....	57.7	66.5	79.9	85.2	76.8	80.4	73.7	75.2
25 to 54.....	50.1	58.4	70.9	76.1	68.5	72.4	65.9	69.0
55 and over.....	25.3	22.9	22.1	20.7	21.0	19.3	19.5	17.2
55 to 64.....	43.0	41.0	41.5	41.8	40.2	39.8	38.1	36.6
65 and over.....	9.7	8.1	7.8	7.2	6.8	6.2	5.9	4.8

Source: Paul O. Flaim and Howard N. Fullerton, "Labor Force Projections to 1990: Three Possible Paths," Monthly Labor Review, Vol. 101, (December 1978), pp. 25-35.

Inflation

If most retired people are spending their time on leisure or non-remunerative activities, what are they doing with their time? What are their problems, concerns, and enjoyments? One thing they are doing is worrying about inflation. According to a survey of working and retired adults conducted by Louis Harris and Associates in 1978, inflation is the number one problem facing both workers and retirees.[1] The study found that 84% of the retirees feel inflation (not retirement) is reducing their standard of living. However, 65% feel that the quality of their lives is as good as when they were working.

Leisure

Aside from coping with the exigencies of inflation, how do older adults spend their time? Answer - pretty much the same way they did in the decade or two before retirement.[2] During the week, watching television is the most frequent leisure activity for both older men and women. On weekends, visiting and entertaining predominates, followed by TV viewing. More of their leisure time is spent at home than anywhere else and mainly in activities that can be done alone.

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1) Louis Harris and Associates, Summary: 1979 Study of American Attitudes Toward Pensions and Retirement.

2) Robert C. Atchley, The Sociology of Retirement, (Massachusetts: Schenkman, 1976).

"After television, the next most prevalent activities are visiting, reading, gardening, going for walks, and handiwork."[1] Older adults also tend to read fewer books and magazines but maintain newspaper readership; in addition, they rate newspapers as more important than television, though spend more time watching television.[2] The favorite TV content centers on news and public affairs programming; local news is their favorite type of content.

Overall, mass media use and other activities that can be done alone tend to fill much of the leisure time in later life. This does not discount the role and importance of social activites. But the qualitative dimensions and meanings of such activities are more difficult to assess properly.

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1) Robert C. Atchley, The Social Forces in Later Life, 2d ed., (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1977).

2) Matilda W. Riley and Ann Foner, Aging and Society Volume I: An Inventory of Research Findings, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1968).

III. MEDIA AND CONSUMER PATTERNS AFTER AGE 65

Newspaper Readership and TV Viewing

The 1977 NAB survey, "How the Public Gets Its News," documented the variations in media usage by different age segments, and the consistent presence of newspapers and television in the lives of older adults (see table 3). Radio use clearly wanes as people age, though a bare majority of older adults do listen to a radio. Television viewing stays fairly constant from age 25 to 54 then climbs at ages 55-64, the beginning of the retirement years. Newspaper reading tends to peak at middle age (45 to 54) and remain fairly constant through the remainder of the life cycle.[1] Breaking newspaper readership down into morning and afternoon papers, we see a similar pattern, though afternoon papers have a fairly constant "peak readership" from age 35 on. The overall age-structure pattern is not as clear when readers are dichotomized into frequent (reads a daily paper 4-5 weekdays) and infrequent readers. Proportions of frequent readers are fairly constant for five of the seven age categories. Similarly, infrequent readership is within a 5% range for five age groups (though different ones) beginning at age thirty.

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1) A recent survey by the Simmons Market Research Bureau suggests that older adults are not as active as daily readers compared with people 45-64 (see table 3A).

Table 3

DAILY MASS MEDIA EXPOSURE,"YESTERDAY"NEWSPAPER READERSHIP, READERSHIP FREQUENCY BY AGE

Percent Exposed "Yesterday" To:

	Radio	TV	Newspapers	Read Any Morning Newspaper	Read Any Afternoon Newspaper	Read Any of Both Types
All Adults[1]	68%	83%	69%	36%	44%	13%
Age:						
18-24	76	76	64	32	38	9
25-29	71	85	58	30	37	11
30-34	71	80	63	35	38	12
35-44	70	83	68	34	45	12
45-54	68	81	75	43	50	19
55-64	63	89	76	40	48	14
65 +	54	91	74	36	50	14

	Frequent Readers	Infrequent Readers	Percentage of Sample
18-24	15%	25%	18%
25-29	10	17	12
30-34	9	10	9
35-44	16	15	16
45-54	18	12	16
55-64	16	11	15
65 +	16	10	14

1) All percentages are based on total weighted responses; N=3,048 respondents, representing 147,184,000 adults when weighted to the total adult population.

Source: "The Daily Diet of News," (Newspaper Advertising Bureau, 1978).

Table 3A

AVERAGE DAILY NEWSPAPER READERSHIP IN 1979[1]

	Read Any	Read 2 or More
Total Adults	70%	14%
By Age:		
18-24 years	60%	10%
25-34 years	66	12
35-44 years	73	13
45-54 years	79	18
55-64 years	75	18
65 years or older	72	13

The preference for TV news content that older people have demonstrated in past research is clearly shown in this study's findings (see table 4). People 55 and older are most likely to watch television, particularly TV news, with people 65-plus being the leading television users and news consumers. It is interesting to note that middle-aged (45 to 64) and elderly people are the least likely to watch television and not watch a news program. We can also see that most of the elderly watched a TV newscast and two-thirds of them watched at least two television news programs -- showing a voracious appetite for news.

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1) Source: Simmons Market Research Bureau, 1979.

Table 4

DAILY TV AND TV NEWS VIEWING BY AGE

	Watched TV	Watched TV News	Watched TV but not News	Watched TV News 5:00-6:59 P.M.	% TV Viewers Who Saw Two or More Daily Newscasts[2]
All Adults[1]	83%	62%	21%	47%	51%
Age:					
18-24	76	48	28	29	42
25-29	85	55	30	37	47
30-34	80	56	24	31	44
35-44	83	56	27	36	41
45-54	81	66	15	52	51
55-64	89	74	15	64	55
65 +	91	80	11	82	67

1) Percentages are based on total weighted respondents in each age group.

2) Percentages are based on the total weighted number of TV news-watchers in each age group.

Source: "The Daily Diet of News." (Newspaper Advertising Bureau, 1978).

If we examine how older adults prefer to satisfy their desire for news when asked to choose between television news and the additional detail provided in the daily newspaper on big news stories, most want the extras provided by a newspaper. However, it is surprising that even more people age 30 to 54 opt for the added detail provided by the newspaper. This may reflect the decrease in visual acuity common in later life, which makes reading more difficult. However, this hypothetical preference should be put in the perspective provided in tables 2, 3, 4; older adults are among the most loyal consumers of news from both television and newspapers. In addition, middle-aged and older adults might be considered the "franchise" for daily newspapers because these age segments have the highest proportions of subscribers (see table 5).

Older adults are heavy subscribers, taking both weekday and Sunday home delivery of a newspaper. Weekday subscribers can be dichotomized into high and low age segments: people under 35 are low, people 35 and over are higher, with the elderly having the highest proportion of subscribers. A similar dichotomy occurs with the home delivery population of the Sunday paper; people age 35 to 64 and older adults are all tightly clustered at 59-62%.

When home delivery populations are subdivided into different population groups we see that the same age groups show above-average subscription levels (see table 6). Average subscription levels vary by the area population size, but the majority of each age segment,

Table 5

PREFERENCE FOR TV NEWS OR NEWSPAPER AS A NEWS SOURCE ON BIG STORIES BY AGE

	Get Enough From TV News	Want Added Details in Newspapers	100% = (Number)
All Respondents	33%	67%	(70,413)
Age:			
18-24	36	64	(12,266)
25-29	43	57	(7,915)
30-34	28	72	(7,076)
35-44	28	72	(12,959)
45-54	30	70	(11,929)
55-64	32	68	(10,629)
65 +	35	65	(10,224)

Source: "The Daily Diet of News," (Newspaper Advertising Bureau, 1978).

Table 6

HOME DELIVERY OF THE DAILY AND SUNDAY NEWSPAPER BY AGE AND AGE WITHIN AREA POPULATION

	Unweighted Base = 100%	Weekday Delivery	Sunday Delivery
All Respondents	3,048	64%	56%
Age:			
18-24	503	56	50
25-29	374	52	47
30-34	319	59	54
35-44	498	66	62
45-54	431	70	61
55-64	453	68	59
65 +	470	72	60

	Weekday Delivery Population			Sunday Delivery Population		
	Under 50,000	50,000 to 499,999	500,000 & Over	Under 50,000	50,000 to 499,999	500,000 & Over
Total Adults	66%	69%	51%	52%	66%	51%
Age:						
18-24	61	59	42	48	55	45
25-34	61	54	46	48	57	47
35-44	70	70	52	62	71	50
45-64	70	78	54	54	73	53
65 +	69	84	58	48	75	60

Source: "The Home Delivery Population," (Newspaper Advertising Bureau, 1978).

beginning with age 35 to 44, have home delivery of the weekday paper. The highest weekday home delivery rate, for the two largest area populations, is found among older adults. The same holds true for Sunday home delivery. (However, Sunday home delivery is not as widespread as weekday home delivery.) The emphasis on home delivery is an important one.

> Aside from the fact that newspaper subscribers provide daily newspapers with a stable and predictable source of income, home delivery is important because people who have home-delivered newspapers are much more likely to be regular readers than those who depend on newsstands, vending machines or other sources. The daily newspaper's impressive reach of nearly 101 million adults on an average weekday largely depends on home delivery; 77% of yesterday's readers live in homes that subscribe to the daily newspaper.[1]

The importance of home delivery for facilitating regular readership is emphasized by the fact that 94% of the elderly who have a newspaper delivered to their home are frequent readers. By way of comparison, only 30% of the elderly who are not subscribers read a daily newspaper four or five weekdays (frequently). In fact, 52% of them do not read any newspaper.

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1) "The Home Delivery Population: Characteristics and Readership Patterns" (Newspaper Advertising Bureau, 1978).

What is it about the daily newspaper that attracts this degree of loyalty on the part of older readers? One study found that middle-aged and older readers (age 55 and over) showed more interest in reading about: social problems, consumer safety, accidents, energy, news about the federal government, letters to the editor, the Middle East, weather, hijackings, health, the local environment and science.[1] The topics that were rated both "very interesting" and "very important" by the same age segment include: international news (22%), national government (25%), state or local government (21%), other news and background (21%), women's interests (16%), features and entertainment (14%) and men's interests (10%). This is in line with our earlier finding that older adults prefer more serious media content, both in newspapers and on television. These content preferences may reflect their awareness of how such issues can have impact on their lives.

A related report[2] evaluated the respondents' reactions to the amount of space they would provide in a hypothetical newspaper, designed for the respondent, containing 34 types of editorial content. The topics allotted space by a strong majority of the middle-aged and elderly (age 55 and older) group included: best food buys (80%), health-nutrition-medical advice (75%), human interest stories on people in the news (74%), editorials (74%), stories on political

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1) "Two Dimensions of News: Interest and Importance Ratings of the Editorial Content of the American Press." (Newspaper Advertising Bureau, 1978).

2) "The Personal Newspaper" (Newspaper Advertising Bureau, 1978). Hard news items were not included in the set of 34 types of content.

figures or public officials (67%), consumer news (64%), religion (60%) and articles on the environment (60%). Even when given a hypothetical choice, the older people's interest in the more serious and practical side of life is apparent.[1] Even when controlling for education, a similar list of topics was given "some space" or "a lot of space" by a strong majority of the older adults.

The preceding findings describe newspaper use by older adults as well as their reactions to different types of editorial content. Other researchers have explored reasons or motivations for newspaper use in later life. One recent study in Indianapolis[2] found the following predictors of newspaper subscriptions for older adults (ages 62 to 87): being married, a strong need to find out what other people are saying about things that are important to them, being a woman, a strong need to be entertained, higher socio-economic status, and strong political interests. Weaver et al stress that other than age, personal needs and interests are better predictors in general of newspaper use than are demographics. Relationships between newspaper use in later life or interests in public affairs, and having higher education levels have been reported by other researchers too.[3]

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1) "The Personal Newspaper" (Newspaper Advertising Bureau, 1978).

2) David H. Weaver, G. Cleveland Wilhoit and Paul Riede, "Personal Needs and Media Use," ANPA News Research Report, No. 21 (1979) pp. 2-7.

3) K. Kent and R.R. Rush, "How Communication Behavior of Older Persons Affect their Public Affairs Knowledge," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 53 (1976), pp. 40-46. Steven H. Chaffee and Donna Wilson, "Adult Life Cycle Changes in Mass Media Use," Paper presented to Association for Education in Journalism, 1975.

They and other researchers have suggested that demographic variables have limited utility as predictors of newspaper use.[1] Clearly it is not a case of needs vs. demographics but a desire to find the best combination of factors to maximize the predictability of newspaper use in the population.

Overall, newspaper use in later life is greatly influenced by three key variables: education, visual acuity and perceived interest or importance of news or current events.[2] Those who have difficulty reading newsprint are less likely to make the extra effort unless they feel some special value in keeping abreast of what is provided by the newspaper, e.g. details on current events.

The effects of education or income are not as obvious as they might initially appear to be. Having a high income means that you can buy more of what you want or need. It also provides a greater sense of security, well-being, personal confidence. Education is usually a path to a secure income and to a job or career that is a source of pride and social identity (given other abilities and opportunities). An individual with more education is better equipped

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1) Albert E. Gollin and Paul A. Salisbury, "Understanding Newspaper Readership Demographics: A Comparison of Three Modes of Analysis," Newspaper Research Journal (forthcoming).

2) See Matilda W. Riley and Ann Foner, Aging and Society, Volume I: An Inventory of Research Findings, (New York: Russell Sage Foundations, 1968); Robert C. Havighurst, Education and Aging, (Washington, D.C.: National Council on the Aging, 1976); Steven H. Chaffee and Donna Wilson, "Adult Life Cycle Changes in Mass Media Use," Paper presented to Association for Education in Journalism, 1975.

to cope with needs related to food, clothing, shelter, employment, Social Security benefits, health care and a healthful lifestyle. It is particularly useful to bear in mind that older adults with more education generally have high incomes, and can afford to be more satisfied with life.[1]

Older Consumers

Best food buys and consumer news were among the topics in which middle-aged and older adults expressed the most interest. A good many (approximately 40-45%) have some physical-activity limitation. Therefore they are apt to shop less frequently and buy more, at least in terms of food shopping. This is also true of the respondents in our 1977 survey.[2] But what does this tell us about the place of consumer activities in their daily lives?

Several recent articles have illustrated how older adults are slower to adopt new products and services. An alternative view of this presumed resistance to innovation might be termed brand loyalty; elderly consumers are (or can be) the "franchise" for

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1) Robert C. Havighurst, Education and Aging (Washington, D.C.: National Council on the Aging, 1976).

2) "The Audience for Newspaper Advertising" (Newspaper Advertising Bureau, 1978).

marketers.[1] Therefore, when senior citizens represent a significant proportion of a targeted segment, one distress signal for needed change in a marketing strategy is a shift in brand loyalty. However older adults can be very particular about where they purchase many products (see table 7). For example, older adults seem to do their shopping at places other than large department stores (or just do less shopping for general merchandise). They may prefer the personal services and relationships, small crowds and more intimate space of neighborhood retail establishments. Furthermore only 65% of all senior citizens have a current driver's license, compared with 86% of all adults 18 through 64.[2] Department stores are increasingly located in shopping centers that are more accessible by automobile; this may limit the use of these stores by senior citizens.

Some over-the-counter health remedies provide examples of products (and concerns) that are important to elderly women. These include: eye drops, aspirin, remedies for indigestion, and laxatives. However, increasing numbers of markets are gearing existing and new products and services to the special needs and desires of this age segment,

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1) J.B. Mason and W.O. Bearden, "Profiling the Shopping Behavior of Elderly Consumers," Gerontologist, Vol. 18 (1978), pp. 454-461; L.W. Phillips and B. Sternthal, "Age Differences in Information Processing," Journal of Marketing Research, Vol. 14 (1977), pp. 444-457; R.A. Strang, "Consumer Trail of Generic Products in Supermarkets," Paper presented to the American Marketing Association Educator's Conference, 1979; W.D. Wells and G. Gubar, "Life Cycle Concept in Marketing Research," Journal of Marketing Research, Vol. 3 (1966), pp. 355-363.

2) Simmons Market Research Bureau, 1979.

Table 7

SHOPPING AT DEPARTMENT STORES DURING LAST THREE MONTHS
BY AGE AND SEX

	J.C. Penney	K Mart	Montgomery Ward	Sears Roebuck & Co.	Other Dept. Stores
Total Men	30%	38%	16%	41%	38%
Men					
18-24	27%	40%	13%	37%	45%
25-34	31	42	18	47	43
35-44	34	39	17	46	41
45-54	30	38	19	42	36
55-64	32	34	18	39	35
65 +	23	26	12	30	23
Total Women	40%	42%	18%	43%	54%
Women					
18-24	39%	44%	21%	37%	57%
25-34	46	49	21	49	58
35-44	45	50	20	50	56
45-54	40	41	18	47	59
55-64	41	38	17	45	53
65 +	27	26	12	29	37

Source: Simmons Market Research Bureau, 1978/79.

from travel to newspaper columns for senior citizens, banking services, retirement homes and college educations.[1]

Where do we go from here?

Where do we go from here? What don't we know that may help newspapers better serve older adults? Here are some unanswered questions:

1. Why do older people read so much more regularly than younger adults? Older adults typically have less education than younger adults, yet older people read the newspaper more regularly. Is there anything we can learn about why older people read more that may be of help in stimulating readership among younger adults? How do they utilize what they read? What changes in the newspaper can be helpful to them? Are there any barriers for the elderly that limit or block readership?

2. Since reported income does not provide a clear picture of discretionary income in later life, what combinations of factors can give us a clearer picture of their status as potential consumers?

3. Older adults tend to be retired from the labor force and have a great deal of leisure time. What activities replace work in their lives? What is the meaning and purpose of volunteer and

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1) "Rich New Market Among Nation's Elderly," U.S. News and World Report (November 12, 1979).

recreational activities in their lives? Do these activities affect their readership of editorial content preferences?

These issues are unusual in media research but seem necessary to help frame a new understanding of older adults as readers, consumers and leisure and volunteer "activists."